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6-2010

# Gifts from the Heart

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### Recommended Citation

Murray, Susan E., "Gifts from the Heart" (2010). *Lake Union Herald*. 404.  
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# FAMILY TIES

## Gifts from the Heart

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

**T**his time of year many couples unite their lives in marriage. They often search for the very best gifts to give one another as a symbol of their love and commitment. Tangible gifts—when given from the heart and received in love—are appreciated deeply, bringing joy to the giver as well. There are other gifts that can also enhance your soul connection. What gifts will you give your beloved this year?

There is no single right way nor are there easy steps that work for all relationships; but in building a consistent and meaningful relationship, couple quiet time plays an important part. This is time when deliberate energy is spent to nurture and enhance marital closeness.

I invite you to consider three classic spiritual disciplines—gifts of time—which can be used in special ways to create a pattern that benefits both of you.

**Shared Worship**—Attending church together is important, but it is easy to attend week after week without making a conscious effort to see that you are doing this as a married couple. In worship, God's transforming power makes its way into your hearts and can give you a renewed capacity to love one another.

**Shared Service**—Something wonderful happens when a couple works as a team to reach out to others. Reaching out together provides opportunities to share compassion with others, which can be reflected back in your marriage. The key is to be deliberate in your plan, seeing this as an opportunity to build your marriage and finding something that fits your own style as a couple.



**Shared Prayer**—Couples who frequently pray together are twice as likely as those who pray less often to describe their marriages as being highly romantic. Many spiritually devout couples who are active in church and committed to their faith never seem to get around to praying together as a couple. No level of being “re-

ligious” can make up for the time couples spend in shared prayer. It is important to pray in ways that are meaningful to both; the form of a couples’ prayer is not nearly as important as the act of having a prayer time together. While you each focus on your individual walks with the Lord on a daily basis, committing time each week to nurture prayer time together will reap even more blessings.

Worship, service and prayer—how exciting that these three spiritual disciplines, ones that we as Christians are so familiar with, can be gifts to your marriage. I invite you to intentionally and specifically honor your marriage partner with gifts that can last a lifetime.

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Susan Murray is an associate professor of family studies who teaches behavioral science and social work at Andrews University. She is a certified family life educator and a licensed marriage and family therapist.